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A POSITION PAPER ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

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THIS POSITION PAPER ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BEGINS BY SUGGESTING 4 GENERAL GOALS FOR THE EXPERIENCES WHICH THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM SHOULD PROVIDE FOR CHILDREN. THESE EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO PROMOTE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, TO PRODUCE SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS OF OUR WORLD, TO DEVELOP COMPETENCE IN COMMUNICATION, AND TO LEAD TO UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, AND EXPRESSIVE ABILITY IN THE ARTS. WAYS IN WHICH TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS CAN HELP PROVIDE THESE ARE SUGGESTED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ARE MADE. AN OUTLINE OF A DAILY PRIMARY PROGRAM IS GIVEN. A SUMMARY STATEMENT OF THE KINDS OF EXPERIENCES CHILDREN SHOULD RECEIVE IS INCLUDED AS IS A STATEMENT OF SOME BASIC HUMAN VALUES WHICH SHOULD BE DEVELOPED IN CHILDREN. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED BY THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS, KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI. (DR)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A POSITION PAPER ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Prepared by the Early Childhood
Workshop Participants, Summer, 1967

American educators are showing a growing awareness of the vital importance of the first few years of school as a basis for future success.

The crucial nature of these years makes it imperative that we work to make them as effective as we possibly can.

To add to our resources, a group of Kirksville teachers and administrators compiled the following pages. Read them carefully, discuss them, evaluate them and take a positive step toward implementing the best of them. Our study in this area will continue. This paper is a valuable beginning.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Schools must meet the social and educational needs of today, always creating an environment that is favorable to learning, providing an opportunity for growth and development and adapting content to meet the needs of the individual child.

The curriculum should provide the kinds of experiences for early childhood education that are designed:

1. To maintain and improve physical and mental health and guide the child toward a satisfying relationship with others.
2. To extend and deepen his understanding of our social and scientific world (man's relationship to man and man's relationship to his own environment).
3. To develop the child's competence in communication and some understanding of math concepts.
4. To build an understanding, appreciation of, and the ability to express his thoughts and his feeling in the arts---areas that open the windows on life.

The provision of a rich and favorable learning environment involves the efforts of many people. These include administrators, teachers, parents, and other people of the community. All contribute to the material needs to provide an ever-changing stimulating background for learning and may also bring a contribution of experiences.

The quality of the teacher and the quality of the experience provided are the two things which really make a difference in learning. The teachers role is very important and is never a static one. As teachers we can help the child by doing the following things:

1. Work with the child where you find him.
2. Set up more interest centers.
3. Allow more guided self discipline.
4. Learn to know the student better.

5. Work for better parent-teacher relationship.
6. Have a more relaxed room.
7. Provide more rhythmic activities.
8. Provide more trips for actual first hand experiences.
9. Provide more dramatization with stories, poems and songs.
10. Use only very carefully selected activity learning and more child participating activities.
11. Be more aware of the frustration level of the child.
12. Help develop a desire for good basic work habits.
13. Help the child to understand himself.
14. Help children develop more satisfying relationship with people in small and large groups.

The administrator is an important part of the team. He should understand the vital importance of his early childhood period of learning. His responsibilities are to help teachers see more clearly the larger objectives of education, the special function of their school, the important needs of their children and how these needs may be met. Among the means available to the supervisor are:

1. Teacher's meetings, at which may be discussed trends in developmental learning and teaching.
2. Workshops, professional seminars, and informal study groups, conducted by teachers and supervisors, in which common educational problems may be studied and tentative solutions reached.
3. Visits to schools in which the educational environment is democratic, liberal, and receptive to new ideas.
4. Conferences with teachers relative to their teaching problems (to aid--not criticize).
5. Demonstrations to help teachers.
6. Systematic interchange of classroom visits by teachers (can do much to foster good professional relations among teachers and stimulate a healthy exchange of ideas and information.)
7. Organizing and administering the school in such a way as to reduce as far as possible the teacher's burden of routine clerical and housekeeping duties, and to free them as much as possible for productive, professional, and cultural activities--and time to teach.

8. Plan an evaluation program in terms of agreed upon values and objectives.
9. Encourage parent conferences.
10. Provide suitable environment and materials for creative and developmental type of teaching.
11. Encourage a close school-community relationship (keep community informed about school, participation of parents in school activities, use of parents for aides and resource materials).

In the light of the research on early childhood education as gleaned from this workshop we would make the following recommendation toward these improvements as soon as possible:

1. Study and evaluate our testing program with a view of eliminating all unnecessary testing.
2. Study our policy on reporting to parents with a hope that we can return to parent-teacher conferences and that we can dispose of our present report cards for primary grades.
3. Work toward provision of facilities so that our teacher load can be reduced, giving the teacher the opportunity to really know each child and have time to study their needs and development.
4. Provide more adequate playground space and materials suitable for small children.
5. Move toward a program of developmental learning in all grades.
6. Provide good professional materials for teacher growth and development.
7. We should stress importance in recognizing kindergarten as a vital part of a child's education and strongly urge that it is not to be considered a readiness preparation for first grade.
8. Transportation provided for field trips to use the community.

How do we know if our program is good? We can tell by the behavior of the children. There will be a spirit of happiness and contentment. They will evidence a feeling of security, a sense of belonging, an impression of adequacy, self-reliance and independence.

Let us constantly remind ourselves of Dr. Heffernan's statement:

"There are no molehills in the education of young people. They are all mountaintops."

DAILY PROGRAM FOR PRIMARY GRADES

(Recommended by Mrs. Elizabeth Evans)

Sharing and Discussion

Reading Groups (choice of learning centers)

Arithmetic---Teacher Guided

Spelling-----Teacher Guided

Writing-----Teacher Guided

Discussion

Science

Social Science

Art

Activity Period (all centers)

P.E.

Story - Literatures - Dramatization

Music

AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGNED TO MEET DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

A good school strives to develop an educational program suited to the maturity level of the child and the social needs of the times.

Reasonable agreement exists in professional circles concerning the kinds of experiences which should be provided to children.

These include activities designed to promote sound physical, mental and emotional health; develop understanding of the social and scientific world; guide the child to acquire command of the tools of learning; build understanding and appreciation of and ability to express thoughts and feelings in the arts.

I. Health

Are there contradictions to what is known about the development of children and the way school programs are planned? How long do children sit still? What do they do? What pressures are on them? Think of them from the standpoint of what you know of their actual development.

II. Understanding the social and scientific world

Content should be organized to develop these four basic concepts:

- a. Variety and pattern
- b. Continuity and change
- c. Interaction and interdependence
- d. Evolutionary development

The basic skill involved is how to use a scientific or problem-solving approach.

III. Command of the tools of learning

We have in school all of the children of all of the people. The basic tools of learning are so important to their future success that this area must occupy a major place in our efforts. Guidance of the child in acquisition of these tools and consideration for the wide range of backgrounds and abilities is essential.

IV. Understanding of and expression in the arts.

No area of the school effort has suffered more from emphasis on materialistic values than the arts. We must be reminded constantly that what homes, schools, and communities value: children value. The love for opera in Milan is equalled by a love for baseball in Kirksville. No avenues through which a child may express his uniqueness should be closed because of decisions of adults who have never had their eyes opened about the importance of the arts in the full development of a person. The school must assure this.

A SENSE OF THE BASIC HUMAN VALUES

Above everything else it is imperative, if we are to maintain our democratic way of life, that children and youth develop a sense of the basic human values, and that homes and schools and other community agencies do whatever is in their power to facilitate the development of such concepts. Here are some of those values:

I. The dignity and importance of the individual

Every child is a person, with his own ways of thinking, learning new ideas, dealing with people, expressing himself, even of walking, talking and playing. He has his own "good things" and "bad things," his own basis of choice. This is not to say that each of these ways is good or final. With help he may modify many of them. But every child has a right to have his chosen ways respected. He will then in turn respect the chosen ways of others. The right to be an individual is the right to be different.

II. The need to seek common purposes

This may appear to be a contradiction of the importance of the individual. But just as we cannot have individualism without confusion, so we cannot have an organized society without common purposes. "A great force in our country is how to develop and maintain the uniqueness of a person who can use these with mutuality towards the goals, the values and the aims of our society."

III. A concept of one's self

Every person will have a picture in his mind's eye of himself and what he can do. "Know thyself," so the Bible tells us. No one could wish to make that picture less attractive, by saying, "Of course you don't do that as well as your brother used to," or "You're not very big for your age, are you?" or "I'd rather do it myself and then it will be right." Instead the picture will grow as he honestly evaluates himself and what he does.

IV. Relationships with others

Pity the person who cannot play, talk, work with other persons in a wholesome, cooperative way. A child starts these relationships very early with

his mother, father, brother and sisters. Then, if they are encouraged, he goes on to find significant and satisfying relationships with others, both children and grown-ups.

V. Growth in learning

This means the skills of reading, writing and manipulation of numbers; a knowledge and appreciation of our nation's history; an acquaintance with the wide world and some concept of our country's place in it; experience with the writings, the art, and the music that are prized in our civilization, and opportunity to try himself out in each; the knowledge of how to collect the necessary facts to make a judgment, and the processes by which such a judgment can logically and fairly be made. No one of these is ever completed, but in each one persons can begin, and can progress.

VI. Service to others

The desire to help someone is universal. Whether this stems from a need to be appreciated, from a feeling of pity because of someone's misfortune, or from a desire to make someone else happy is really immaterial. There is so much that needs doing, so much unevenness to be alleviated, so much unhappiness, that it is a good thing that the desire to help someone, or some cause, needs only to be encouraged.

VII. The desire to do right

This is an ethical value. The right way for one person, or one family, or community, or group, or the followers of some religion may seem wrong to others. For that reason we always need to look at the motives behind actions. According to their concepts of right, most people really want to do right. There are a lot of common Americanisms that show this: to "do right" by another, or "to get at the right of a thing" for example. If a person has a commitment to ethical, moral, or spiritual values, the desire to do right as it affects other people will, if multiplied by the millions, make for a better world.